

TRANSFORMATIONS: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

CALL THEME

CHANCE will support new and innovative research into the workings, meaning and consequences of transformations and innovations in the present digital age, viewed through the lens of the social and cultural dynamics. Whilst the call text does not preclude comparison with or investigation into other regions, every proposal must demonstrate a strong European dimension (i.e. investigating the changes taking place / affecting Europe as a whole, or at the level of a European country, city, community, etc.).

SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Over centuries, various technological changes have affected and still continue to affect all spheres of human activity. At the same time, society has been and is shaping technological changes. This is particularly important now, since today's social, economic, political, technological and cultural transformations generate opportunities as well as challenges. Digitalisation, which refers to the cultural and societal changes brought about by the pervasive use of digital technologies, brings economic progress and opportunities, but also threats, social anxieties and feelings of insecurity. Digitalisation yields new forms of communication, expressing emotions and creativity, as well as new forms of acquiring knowledge and distributing information. On the other hand, digital transformations raise questions about values and identities, about individuality versus public interest and solidarity, about participation, social justice and inclusion. These changes do not occur simultaneously in or uniformly across all countries and in all parts of societies, resulting in new social divisions and differences between various social groups and communities.

The present transnational call in the humanities and social sciences focuses on research into the workings, meaning and consequences of transformations and innovations in the present digital age. The objective of this call is to help understand how digital innovations give rise to social and cultural changes, and are also influenced by society and culture. Comparative approaches referring to the past are also welcome. The two topics within this large theme – cultural and social transformations – are detailed in the scope section below.

SCOPE

TOPIC 1. Cultural Transformations in the Digital Age

Cultural transformations are a constant phenomenon in human history. Nevertheless, today, digital tools, the processes of digitalisation and the digitalisation of processes have – really or apparently – contributed to the acceleration of these transformations. We are approaching a culture of algorithms that influences our daily lives, behaviours, cultural practices, judgements and values. The questions to be asked are: What is the impact that such processes are having on us and our cultures? How radically new these processes are relative to past innovations such as literacy, print,

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railways, the telegraph, radio and television What is the influence of different cultural traditions on technological transformations?

Identity, values and worldviews

As digital tools permeate virtually every aspect of our lives, we are connected through devices which constantly yield data that are being captured, analysed, and returned to us in processed forms such as personalized ads and recommendations. How does this affect our identity, and individual sovereignty? How does it shape our encounters with and understandings of the other? Digital communication holds the promise of social interaction, global integration and human solidarity. However, it makes inequality more visible and can also isolate individuals and groups – regional, political, ethnic, class-based – in echo chambers or ‘filter bubbles’, compromising the existence of a common space for public debate and enabling the spread of fake news, hate speech, populism, and xenophobia. How do we create and secure spaces for free and creative thoughts in a digitalised world? How are freedom and creativity even defined, as algorithms learn and use our patterns of communication? How do we address issues of responsibility, trust, and transparency? How does one develop legal and ethical standards that can cope with these challenges? Does historical comparison help understand these processes and problems?

New stories, new aesthetics: Remaining human

From ancient times to the science fiction of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and the Cyberpunk, the arts, literature, philosophy, etc. have been a fundamental source of imagination and imagery, inspiring technological inventions and trying to foresee their social, cultural, and linguistic consequences. Today, utopian as well as dystopian understandings of technological developments and digitalisation resurface in the different currents of Posthumanism and what is becoming known as the Posthumanities. Digital visualization, machine learning, robotics and AI are major innovations fast developing in the fields of the technical and natural sciences, whilst, at the same time, constantly interacting with emotions, creativity and imagination. At such junctures, new aesthetics and narratives emerge, questioning how we want to live and how we can live together. What are the cultural, ethical and futuristic accounts of a digitalised world? How do they interact with the processes of digitalisation? To what extent are technological transformations responsible for reshaping the worlds of our imagination, and to what extent is technology giving shape to transformations already anticipated in earlier imaginative thinking – utopian and dystopian?

The Humanities and technological transformations: past, present, future

Throughout its history, humanity has experienced many forms of inventions, some of which have brought major technical transformations. Scholars have always reflected upon the relations between humans and their cultural environments, investigating the impact of technological change on the generation, storage and transmission of knowledge. For example, a highly representative strand of the Humanities in the 20th Century has developed a thorough critique of modernity and technological progress, calling into question the very humanistic foundations of European cultures and societies. What has been, is and might still be the role of the Humanities in assessing large systemic transformations? Can we compare current developments in the digital era with historical phenomena? How do we move from passive observation and critical distancing to active participation in shaping the processes of digitalisation, reflecting on the human use and adoption of new technologies in order to move towards a more equal, democratic, knowledge-based access to and use of them? Is there a place in all this for Humanism or will it be replaced by some thoroughly non-anthropocentric vision of humanity and its interactions with the non-human?

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TOPIC 2. Digitalisation and Social Transformation

The changing relationship between technology and society potentially transforms the social, political, legal, economic and psychological conditions of life and raises questions about the role of technological innovation for societal progress. For example, do technological innovations save time in our daily lives, leaving us ever freer for social and cultural pursuits – or does the distraction caused by digital interruptions actually drive out creativity and innovation and jeopardise education and productive work? Does digitalisation constitute a threat for individual and communal freedom or lead to citizen-driven transformations? How can we harness robust empirical research to optimise the positive outcomes of technological transformation whilst simultaneously understanding and mitigating the potential downsides for individuals, communities, organisations, institutions and society as a whole?

Digitalisation and social relations

The debate about digitalisation resembles previous controversies about large-scale social transformations like modernization, industrialization and globalization. On the one hand there are enthusiasts praising the immense potential of innovations for growth and enhanced social progress. On the other there are sceptics fearing for the loss of essential human qualities at the hand of technology. Observers have noted how digitalisation is altering social life and the use of time, but more rigorous research is needed to understand the antecedents and effects of technological innovation for social relations and the pace of life. Has digitalisation led to a new form of temporality? What kind of effects does digitization have on the very understanding of time and space? How does digitalisation impact the quantity and quality of the time we spend with family and friends? How does digitalisation affect intra-generational communication? How do digital innovations create or solve social inequalities? How do innovations shape gender-differences, our work-life balance and ways in which we use time?

Digitalised work and organizations

New technology has created novel challenges for the labour market, giving a new edge to the ongoing debate about skill-biased technological change. Digitalisation is having significant ramifications for organizations in both the public and corporate sphere. The changing nature of work has already become a salient public issue, with the rise of outsourcing and the gig economy. Current technological transformations are increasingly affecting our perceptions of quality of work and of productivity, altering the temporal and spatial dimensions of work and collaboration. We need to increase our understanding of fundamental questions addressing the meaning and productive potential of work in the digital age. Does new technology always effectively lead to greater efficiency or does digitalisation have counter-productive side-effects and unintended negative consequences? What kind of effects does digitalisation have on the workings of public policy, institutions and the economy? What is the impact of digital transformation on job displacement, on wages, on wealth distribution and poverty? How can we understand new forms of organisational memory in times of massive data generation? What are the main driving forces behind digitalisation and what actors promote it through public policies?

Knowledge and learning in the digital age

Digitalisation affects not only the production of data but also its accessibility and the consumption of information, and thus the very nature of knowledge production. Innovations such as the high-speed internet, electronic books and digital newspapers and mobile devices have fundamentally changed the way knowledge is acquired and information is consumed. The diffusion of “content” is immediate and virtually everyone has the potential to influence public opinion through social

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media. The potential for knowledge manipulation through new technologies also raises political questions, such as the impact of digitalisation on elections, justice and ethics. From a legal point of view, new questions regarding copyright law and freedom of expression have emerged in the digital era. New technology has also raised new challenges for education and learning. How do education systems adapt to meet emerging skill requirements? What and how do we teach? In relation to what we as societies consider important to protect and safeguard against? Do technologies help us to acquire knowledge more quickly? What are the effects of technological transformation on attention, memory and cognitive and emotional capacities? Research is also needed as well to identify the potentially adverse impacts of digital innovations. This line of inquiry may interrogate the ownership of the huge data-intensive digital platforms that control access to the new world of knowledge and learning, and shape how data about ourselves are processed, interpreted and transformed into accepted knowledge in society. Finally, the emergence of artificial intelligence and data mining has also affected the epistemological and methodological bases of social science research itself, and new studies may elucidate the ways in which the production of scientific knowledge is impacted by new forms of human-computer interaction.

APPROACHES AND METHODS

This call has been designed to attract innovative and ambitious projects that will develop the field conceptually and empirically. It invites research focusing on the ethical, legal, social, economic, educational, political, psychological, cultural, religious and historical contexts and consequences (or impacts) of innovations. The call encourages proposals based on a comparative perspective, both cross-national and across time. Inter- and transdisciplinary research is especially welcome, for example, on the consequences of the digital turn on individual lives, democratic values and procedures (such as e.g. political participation), inequalities, social cohesion, knowledge and education, work and employment, entrepreneurship, and perception of time, as well as on memories, identities, narratives, legal issues and ethical concerns, cultural practices, the arts, communication media, public discourse, etc.

Proposals can emphasize theoretical developments, qualitative investigation, or quantitative data and experimental designs as well as mixed methods and meta-analyses or systematic reviews. Projects are expected to build on existing empirical evidence and to produce added value through the development of European cross-national research collaborations exploring the impacts of variations in the psychological, social, economic, cultural and political contexts of digitalisation. Such interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives will also allow projects to identify the cultural and social roots of ingenuity, build creative environments, and foster conditions for social and technological innovation, sustainable economic development and preparedness for change.

Research cutting across several of the themes outlined in the call, examining the interactions and interrelationships between different challenges is strongly encouraged. A cross-national comparative focus is central to the Programme design. Research projects that extend comparisons beyond European countries are welcome, although this call is in principle focused on the European context. Proposals are expected to devote significant attention to discussing how their findings could help develop responses to the major challenges indicated in this call.

The innovation expected of proposals may come in many ways, including through pursuing new research agendas in the field, developing fresh approaches to familiar issues, bringing comparative approaches, applying new methodologies or using established techniques

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imaginatively in previously unfamiliar areas. Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop close relationships with relevant stakeholders and research users.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND IMPACT

Knowledge exchange (KE) is a two-way process which brings together academic staff, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise. It is a process of working collaboratively, and is most effective when these relationships are established at the very start of a proposal.

Knowledge exchange activities are a crucial dimension of any proposed research project. In addition to the networking that takes place among academic partners and broader dissemination activities aimed at wider academic audiences, projects are also expected to develop links with stakeholders outside the academy in order to maximise the impact and societal benefit of the research. For example, collaborations may include the public sector, policy makers, governmental agencies at local, regional, national and trans-national levels; parliamentary assemblies; public, private and voluntary, community and charitable organisations etc.; advocacy organisations for marginalised groups; employers and the media, the creative, cultural and heritage sectors, broadcasters, museums, galleries, business, industry, and practitioners (e.g. in the creative and performing arts). Collaborations should be meaningful for all partners involved and enable joint learning throughout the duration of the project and beyond.

It is recognised that you may not know the impact of your research at the proposal stage. However, a knowledge exchange perspective should be included in the application, and we encourage applicants to explore, from the outset and throughout the life of your project and beyond, who could potentially benefit from your research and what you can do to help make this happen. Proposals should therefore include concrete plans for collaboration and knowledge exchange, identifying potential audiences, how these activities will add significant value to the research, and how your knowledge exchange activities will be monitored and evaluated throughout and beyond the project. Active inclusion of non-academic partners from the preparation phase of the project is encouraged.

A short guide to Knowledge Exchange is available at:

http://heranet.info/assets/uploads/2019/09/Toolkits_13Dec2019.html .

DIVERSITY

CHANSE aims at promoting diversity in research. Submitted proposals are therefore strongly encouraged to take into account the following aspects:

- Gender diversity, that is, considering the under-represented gender, and further addressing the following dimensions: i) gender balance among the Principal Investigators, and ii) gender balance in the overall project teams as a whole. For further information please see [NORFACE statement on gender equality](#);
- Academic age balance, that is, heterogeneous teams, including post-doctoral and PhD students as participants in the project, thus allowing for inter-generation transfer of knowledge, skills, etc.
- Geographical diversity, that is, geographically balanced consortia. In order to strengthen the European Research Area, overcome the fragmentation of research in the ERA, a wide inclusion

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of research teams from all the countries/regions participating in the call is encouraged, with a particular attention to research teams from the Widening Countries participating in the call: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.



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